

COUNCIL WATCH FLEURIEU INC.

NEWSLETTER SPECIAL REPORT– June 2026

“Accountability with Integrity”

TWO COUNCILS SAID YES TO SAVINGS - WHY DID VICTOR HARBOR SAY NO?

**TWO COUNCILS SAID YES TO SAVINGS —
WHY DID VICTOR HARBOR SAY NO?**

Back-office efficiency proposal sparks fresh debate over council priorities,
administrative control and future regional governance.

✓ YES TO SAVINGS
ALEXANDRINA COUNCIL SUPPORTED
YANKALILLA COUNCIL SUPPORTED

BETTER VALUE FOR RATEPAYERS
SHARED SERVICES
LOWER COSTS
REDUCE DUPLICATION
SMARTER COUNCILS
STRONGER REGIONS

✗ NO TO INVESTIGATING SAVINGS
VICTOR HARBOR COUNCIL

ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROL
AMALGAMATION CONCERNS
REGIONAL LEAD ROLE
TIMING CONCERNS

**OUR COMMUNITY.
OUR MONEY.
OUR FUTURE.**
ACCOUNTABILITY. TRANSPARENCY. SAVINGS.

**BEFORE YOU ASK FOR MORE,
SHOW YOU'VE LOOKED FOR SAVINGS.
RATEPAYERS DESERVE ANSWERS.**

Back-office efficiency proposal sparks fresh debate over council priorities,
administrative control and future regional governance.

The City of Victor Harbor has rejected a proposal that would have allowed the three southern Fleurieu councils to formally investigate whether shared back-office administrative services could reduce costs to ratepayers.

The proposal, strongly advocated by Strathalbyn resident, business owner and ratepayer Mr Terry Scolari, sought only to investigate potential efficiencies involving administrative functions such as:

- Payroll
- Human Resources
- Procurement
- Accounts
- Fleet Services
- Information Technology
- Internal administration systems

Importantly, the proposal did not seek council amalgamation, loss of local representation, or the abolition of councils.

Both Alexandrina Council and the District Council of Yankalilla supported progressing the proposal.

However, at the recent City of Victor Harbor Council meeting, a motion brought forward by Cr Stewart Burns seeking independent investigation and scoping advice was defeated.

The vote has now triggered wider community discussion regarding:

- rising operational costs,
- administrative duplication,
- future governance models,
- and increasing financial pressure on regional ratepayers.

WHAT THE COMMUNITY WAS REALLY ASKING

At its core, the proposal asked a simple question:

Before increasing rates further, should councils investigate whether savings can be achieved behind the administrative front door?

Mr Terry Scolari repeatedly stated during his deputations that the proposal was not about amalgamation, but rather about examining whether councils were duplicating expensive internal systems and administration functions unnecessarily.

He argued that councils already collaborate extensively on:

- planning,
- waste management,
- regional committees,

- and public services,

yet appear reluctant to formally investigate similar efficiencies within their own internal administration structures.

Mr Scolari further argued that councils cannot continue seeking additional revenue from ratepayers while refusing to fully examine potential internal savings opportunities.

WHY DID VICTOR HARBOR REJECT THE MOTION?

Analysis of the council debate indicates the City of Victor Harbor's opposition was not necessarily against regional collaboration itself, but rather against the structure and implications of the Burns motion.

Several concerns emerged during debate.

1. Concerns Regarding Loss of Administrative Control

Some elected members argued that combining administrative functions between councils could reduce Victor Harbor's direct control over strategic priorities and operational responsiveness.

Questions were raised regarding:

- who would direct shared staff,
- how competing priorities would be managed,
- and whether one administrative structure could effectively serve three separate councils.

2. Concerns Regarding Future Amalgamation

Although the proposal specifically denied any intention toward amalgamation, several elected members openly linked the concept of shared administration to possible future council mergers.

This remains a politically sensitive issue throughout regional South Australia.

3. Victor Harbor's Role as Regional Lead Council

Comments made during debate suggested some elected **members view Victor Harbor as the primary regional driver of major projects**, regional infrastructure and strategic growth initiatives.

Concerns were raised that Victor Harbor could potentially lose influence or strategic flexibility under expanded shared-service arrangements.

4. Timing Concerns

The council also raised concerns regarding timing, including:

- CEO recruitment,
- budget preparation,
- major regional projects,
- and ongoing governance pressures.

Some members argued the issue should instead be revisited by the next council term.

THE IRONY OF THE FINAL RESULT

While the Cr Stewart Burns motion failed, Victor Harbor Council subsequently adopted an alternative motion from Cr Brayden Mann which specifically referenced:

- revisiting the Fleurieu Futures report,
- exploring shared services,
- and examining future regional opportunities including possible amalgamation discussions.

This outcome has created significant community interest and debate.

The council rejected a narrowly targeted proposal to investigate administrative efficiencies yet subsequently supported a broader motion that potentially opens discussion toward even larger regional governance reform.

In practical terms, the meeting demonstrated that:

- regional collaboration remains politically active,
- shared services discussions are far from over,
- and future governance reform conversations are likely to continue into the next council term.

WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

With Alexandrina and Yankalilla already supporting further investigation, Victor Harbor now effectively remains the council preventing a unified regional approach from proceeding.

The broader issue facing the Fleurieu remains unchanged.

Regional councils continue facing:

- increasing costs,
- expanding compliance obligations,
- growing infrastructure demands,

- workforce pressures,
- and rising expectations from the community.

Many residents are now asking whether councils should place greater focus on:

- reducing duplication,
- sharing internal services,
- improving efficiency,
- and protecting ratepayers from unnecessary cost escalation.

Council Watch believes the community deserves:

- open discussion,
- transparent investigation,
- independent financial analysis,
- and evidence-based decision making.

Investigating potential efficiencies does not automatically mean amalgamation.

Nor does it mean loss of local identity or democratic representation.

What it does mean is asking whether better value for ratepayers can be achieved through smarter administration and regional cooperation.

The debate now appears likely to continue well beyond the current council term.

One thing is already clear:

The issue of regional collaboration and administrative efficiency is no longer hypothetical.

It is now firmly part of the future governance discussion for the Fleurieu Peninsula.

FINAL OBSERVATION

For many residents, the issue is becoming increasingly simple: local government should exist to serve the community first, not preserve bureaucracy for its own sake.

Ratepayers are entitled to ask whether councils are operating as efficiently as possible before continually seeking additional revenue from households and businesses.

Every major project, new initiative or administrative expansion ultimately comes back to the same source of funding — the ratepayer.

Many in the community are now questioning whether councils have become too comfortable treating rate increases as the default solution instead of first examining internal savings, duplication and administrative efficiency.

The debate surrounding the back-office proposal has now moved beyond one motion at one council meeting.

It has become part of a much larger public discussion about:

- accountability,
- priorities,
- financial sustainability,
- and whether local government is genuinely placing community interests ahead of institutional self-preservation.

That debate is unlikely to disappear.

Terry Andrews (Chair)

COUNCIL WATCH FLEURIEU INC.

Accountability with Integrity

Email: councilwatch44@gmail.com

Web: <https://councilwatchvictorharbor.com/>

The time for change is now!

This correspondence is provided in good faith as part of Council Watch's public interest oversight activities.